

THE PLAN OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

DISCUSSION 1

UNIFORM SYSTEM FOR TEACHING THE GOSPEL



A vertical spiral binding consisting of a series of black plastic rings connected by a thin wire, running down the center of the page.

THE PLAN OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

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UNIFORM SYSTEM FOR TEACHING THE GOSPEL

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THIS DISCUSSION

Planning for the Discussion

Prepare to teach this discussion by thinking about the investigators' needs. Review the main principles of the discussion. Then plan how you might present the discussion to meet these needs. For example, consider—

- Which of your own experiences might be meaningful to the investigators.
- What examples might help them understand clearly or resolve their concerns.
- Which Book of Mormon passages you could share with them.
- Which of their own experiences might relate to your message.

Specifically, plan (1) what you will do to prepare these investigators to feel the Spirit, (2) when to invite them to make commitments, and (3) how you will follow up to help them keep their commitments.

The main focus of this discussion should be the Book of Mormon and the Prophet Joseph Smith. Do not spend too much time on the first two principles, especially if the investigators basically agree with what you present. Leave enough time to discuss the truths that are unique to the restored gospel. After the discussion, the investigators' strongest impressions should be of the Book of Mormon and the Prophet Joseph Smith. Through them we gained our understanding of God and his plan.

Doctrinal Overview

During this discussion you will talk about God the Father and Jesus Christ. You then will introduce Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. The main principles in this discussion are—

1. God the Father has a plan for our happiness. It is called the plan of salvation.
2. Jesus Christ has a central mission in the plan.
3. God reveals the truth about his plan through prophets.
4. The Prophet Joseph Smith is a modern witness of Jesus Christ. Through him God has restored knowledge about the divine plan.
5. The Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ that clearly explains the divine plan.
6. Through the Holy Ghost each person can know that this message is true.

Commitments

During this discussion you need to help the investigators feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. This will prepare them to make the commitments that lead to conversion and baptism. During this discussion the investigators should commit themselves to—

1. Read from the Book of Mormon and pray to know that it is true. The following reading assignment is suggested:

Moroni 10:3-5

Introduction to the Book of Mormon (including the testimonies and the brief explanation of the plates)

3 Nephi 11

Also encourage the investigators to start reading the Book of Mormon from the beginning.

2. Pray to know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.
3. Take part in the next discussion (preferably the remaining five discussions) at a specific time.

CREATE A LEARNING ATMOSPHERE

DISCUSSION

Become Acquainted and Build Relationships of Trust

Establish a Reverent Atmosphere

Introduce This Discussion

TEACHING HELPS

You might share information about yourself, including—

- Your hometown, family, and schooling.
- Your interests.
- Why you came on a mission.

You might find out about the investigators'—

- Family.
- Work.
- Interests.
- Religious attitudes.
- Experiences that led them to investigate the Church.
- Acquaintance with members of the Church and knowledge of the Church.

Set a reverent and relaxed atmosphere for the discussion. Remember that you are a guest in the investigators' home.

You should—

- With the investigators' permission, arrange the seating so all can participate comfortably.
- Try to remove distractions. For instance, ask whether you may turn off the television or radio.
- Recognize the family head. Invite all family members to participate.
- With the permission of the family head, offer a prayer.

Explain that you want to share ideas about God and how he reveals his will to us today. You will discuss (1) how we can know the truth about God and (2) the purpose of our lives.

Explain that you will speak from your own experiences. Tell the investigators that you want to answer their questions as you discuss the gospel. Let them know that you will give an organized presentation and may refer to notes.

Briefly tell the investigators what you expect of them. (They should, for example, feel free to express their feelings, ask questions, tell you when they do not understand, and sincerely try to find out whether your message is true.)

PRINCIPLE 1 THE PLAN OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

DISCUSSION

We Believe in God

Most people believe in a Supreme Being, even though they may call him by different names. We know that God lives. We want to share with you our feelings about him.

God Is Perfect

God is perfect, all-wise, and all-powerful. He is also merciful, kind, and just. We know that we can have faith in him. We can love him with all our hearts.

God Is Our Father in Heaven

We are children of our Father in Heaven. We are created in his image. Because he is the Father of all people, we are brothers and sisters.

God Has a Plan for Us

As our Father, God loves us. He wants us to progress and be happy. He wants us to become more like him. He prepared a plan that will bring us joy in this life and eternal life with him. This plan is called the plan of salvation.

TEACHING HELPS

Find Out—

- What the investigators believe about God.
- How they feel about God.

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- Your belief in God, his wisdom, and his love for us.
- What it means to you to know that you are a child of God.
- The happiness you have found through your efforts to grow and become more like God.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

Mosiah 4:9 ("Believe in God; . . . believe that he has all wisdom, and all power.")

Genesis 1:26-27 ("God created man in his own image.")

Matthew 5:48 ("Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.")

Acts 17:24-29 ("We are the offspring of God.")

Romans 8:16 ("We are the children of God.")

Topical Guide: God; God the Father—Elohim/Eloheim; Man, a Spirit Child of Heavenly Father; Man, Potential to Become like Heavenly Father.

EXAMPLES

PRINCIPLE 2 THE DIVINE SONSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

DISCUSSION

We Need Help to Overcome Sin and Death

Without the help of our Father in Heaven, we could not benefit from the plan of salvation. In mortal life, each of us sins and falls short of perfection. Our sins make us unworthy to return to our Father in Heaven. In addition, each of us will die to end this mortal life.

God Sent Jesus Christ to Fulfill the Plan

God provided a way for us to overcome sin and death so that we can return to his presence. The central figure in the plan of salvation is Jesus Christ. [Read and discuss *John 3:16*.] It is wonderful to think of the great love our Heavenly Father has for us.

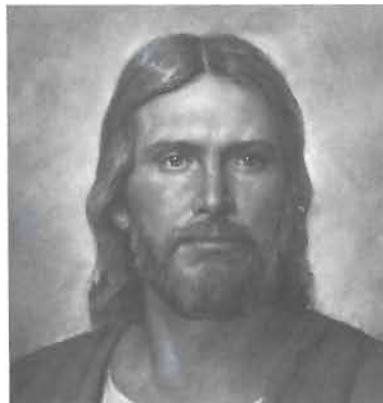
Christ Overcame Sin and Death

Jesus fulfilled his part of the plan. Through his sacrifice and resurrection, we can overcome the effects of sin and all men will live again after mortal death.

Christ Showed Us How to Fulfill the Plan

The plan of salvation is simple and easy to understand, but we must choose to follow it. [Read and discuss *John 14:6*.] By his perfect example and his teachings, Jesus showed us how to fulfill this plan.

TEACHING HELPS



Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand that our sins would keep us from returning to God.
- How they feel about Jesus Christ.

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators have seen blessings enter their lives because they followed the example of Christ or did Christlike things.
- Which of the teachings of Christ have meant the most to them.

DISCUSSION

Have Faith to Do What He Taught

If we have faith to do what Jesus Christ taught, we will find peace in this life. Also, we can become more like him and like our Heavenly Father. We can return to live with them after this life.

TEACHING HELPS

- Testify:* Express your feelings about—
- The love our Heavenly Father has shown by sending his Son to save the world.
 - Your love for the Savior and your appreciation for his sacrifice.
 - How the teachings of Christ have helped you find peace and happiness.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

1 Nephi 11:32-33 (Jesus Christ was “slain for the sins of the world.”)

2 Nephi 9:21-24 (Christ will “save all men if they will hearken unto his voice.”)

Alma 7:12 (Christ will “loose the bands of death.”)

3 Nephi 27:13-14 (The Father sent Christ into the world to be lifted up on the cross.)

John 7:17 (“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.”)

John 14:15 (“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”)

Topical Guide: Commandments of God; Jesus Christ, Atonement through; Jesus Christ, Mission of; Jesus Christ, Redeemer; Obedience, Obedient, Obey

EXAMPLES

PRINCIPLE 3 HOW THE PLAN HAS BEEN REVEALED

DISCUSSION

God Follows a Pattern

Our Heavenly Father wants all of us to understand the plan of salvation and the mission of Jesus Christ in that plan. He has established a simple pattern in revealing this plan to his children.

He Chooses Witnesses

God chooses righteous men as his witnesses. They learn from firsthand experience the truth about the plan and the mission of Christ in that plan. These men are called prophets and apostles.

The Prophets Testify of Christ

God gives these prophets authority to act for him. He commands them to teach others. They share their witness about Christ in two ways. First, they teach people directly. Second, they write their testimonies and the truths of the gospel in sacred books called scripture.

The Holy Ghost Confirms Truth

People hear the prophets or read their words in the scriptures. They can know that the prophets' teachings are true by the power of the Holy Ghost.

We Are Invited to Obey

When people know the truth by the power of the Holy Ghost, the servants of the Lord invite them to act upon this knowledge.

TEACHING HELPS

GOD'S PATTERN

He chooses witnesses.
The prophets testify of Christ.
The Holy Ghost confirms truth.
We are invited to obey.

Scripture: Amos 3:7 (God will do nothing without revealing his secret to his prophets.)

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand what a prophet is and how he can help us know the truth.

DISCUSSION

TEACHING HELPS

- Whether they understand how the Holy Ghost can help us recognize the truth of a prophet's words.

- Testify:* Express your feelings about—
- Your faith that God chooses witnesses to teach the truth in simplicity and purity.
 - How the Holy Ghost has confirmed your understanding of the truth.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

Moroni 7:29-32 (Angels minister to chosen men, who preach and prepare others to receive the Holy Ghost.)

Mark 16:15-20 (The Lord commanded the apostles to preach and baptize. He confirmed the word with signs.)

John 15:16 ("Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you.")

Hebrews 5:4; Exodus 28:1, 41 (The Lord's servants must be called "as was Aaron.")

Topical Guide: Prophets, Mission of

EXAMPLES

To show how God worked through a prophet in ancient times:

One example of a prophet is Moses. On Mount Sinai, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. Moses then gave them to the rest of the people. Today, we have those commandments in the Bible. (See Exodus 20:3-22.)

To demonstrate the pattern for revealing truth in the time of Christ:

Read and discuss Acts 10:38-48.

Verses 39-41: God showed Jesus to chosen witnesses.

Verses 42-43: He commanded them to preach and testify.

Verses 44: The Holy Ghost fell on those who heard.

Verses 47-48: The people were commanded to be baptized.

PRINCIPLE 4 THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH: A MODERN WITNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

DISCUSSION

In Our Day, God Has Followed His Pattern for Revealing Truth

God has followed his pattern for revealing truth in our day. He chose a prophet who learned about the plan of salvation from firsthand experience. This prophet was Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith Was Confused about Religion

In 1820 Joseph Smith was just fourteen. He was confused by the many different ideas being taught about religion. Churches claimed to teach the truth about God. But young Joseph was confused by the great differences among their teachings. He described his feelings in these words: [Read JS—H 1:8, or the same passage from The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony.]

Joseph Learned How to Gain Wisdom

One day Joseph read a passage in the Bible that showed him how to overcome this confusion. [Read JS—H 1:11-12, or the same passage from The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony.]

Joseph Prayed for Wisdom

Joseph decided to do just as the Bible said. He would ask God in prayer. One spring morning he went into a nearby grove of trees. He knelt down and began to pray to God with all his heart. Because of his great faith, he fully expected God to answer his prayer.

TEACHING HELPS

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators have been confused in a similar way.

Explain: When you read James 1:5, you might, if necessary, explain that *upbraid* means to criticize or scold.

DISCUSSION

Joseph Saw God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son

In his own words, this is what happened. [Read the following parts from JS—H 1:16-17, or from The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony.]

"I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*"

In answer to his prayer, God the Father and Jesus Christ visited young Joseph.

Joseph Smith Was a Prophet of God

Through this and other experiences, Joseph Smith was called as a prophet. He was much like Moses and other biblical prophets. They also saw God and were called to preach his message.

Joseph Is a Witness of Christ

Because he saw and talked with the resurrected Savior, Joseph Smith is a powerful witness of Jesus Christ. Through him, God revealed the truths of the plan of salvation, including the divine mission of Jesus Christ.

TEACHING HELPS



Testify: Express your feelings about—

- Joseph Smith's vision of the Father and the Son.
- The importance of Joseph Smith's divine call as a witness of Christ.
- Joseph Smith's calling to restore the truth about the plan of salvation.

Find Out—

- How the investigators feel about your instruction on Joseph Smith.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

EXAMPLES

2 Nephi 3:5-11 (Joseph prophesied of a choice seer of the latter days.)

D&C 1:17-18 (God called Joseph Smith and commanded him to proclaim the gospel.)

D&C 5:10 (This generation shall receive the word of the Lord through Joseph Smith.)

D&C 35:17 (The fulness of the gospel was sent forth by Joseph Smith.)

Topical Guide: Joseph Smith

PRINCIPLE 5 THE BOOK OF MORMON: ANOTHER TESTAMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

DISCUSSION

Joseph Smith Brought Forth the Book of Mormon

As a witness of Christ, Joseph Smith received authority to teach the gospel. He also brought forth additional scriptures. He was commanded to translate the writings of ancient prophets. These writings are found in the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Mormon Contains the Writings of Prophets

The Book of Mormon contains the writings of ancient prophets. The first of these, Lehi, lived in Jerusalem around 600 B.C. The Lord commanded Lehi to lead a small group of people to the American continent. There they established a great civilization. God continued to call prophets among these people. The Book of Mormon is a collection of their writings. It is named after one of the prophets.

Book of Mormon Prophets Taught about Christ

These prophets knew about the plan of salvation and the mission of the Savior. In fact, after his resurrection Christ appeared to the people in America. He taught them his gospel and formed his Church among them.

TEACHING HELPS

Show: Show the investigators a copy of the Book of Mormon. You might show them some of the features (such as the title page, the introduction and testimonies, the table of contents, the chapter headings, the index). You might also share with them one or two passages that are most meaningful to you.

DISCUSSION

Another Testament of Christ

For centuries, the truth about the plan of salvation was available primarily in the Bible. God has now given us the Book of Mormon. It stands as another testament of Jesus Christ. [Read and discuss 2 Corinthians 13:1, beginning with the phrase "In the mouth of..."]

Commitment Invitation: Read

To help you begin reading the Book of Mormon, we suggest that you read a few selected passages by our next visit. We suggest the Introduction (including the testimonies and the brief explanation of the plates), Moroni 10:3-5, and 3 Nephi 11.

Will you read these passages by (date)?

Will you also begin reading the Book of Mormon from the beginning?

TEACHING HELPS

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand what the Book of Mormon is.
- Whether they understand how it is another testament of Christ.
- Whether they will read the Book of Mormon.

Testify:

 Express your feelings about—

- The truthfulness of the Bible.
- The truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.
- The testimony of Jesus Christ as found in the Book of Mormon. (As appropriate, use the visual on the Book of Mormon and the Bible.)
- How the Book of Mormon has affected your life.

Show: Show the investigators these passages in a copy of the Book of Mormon. Explain each passage briefly. Stimulate their interest by reading part of the Introduction or 3 Nephi 11. You might also leave a marker in each passage.

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand what you expect of them.
- How they feel about this commitment.

Follow Up: Discuss with the investigators how you can help them keep their commitment to read. For example, you could—

- Visit them tomorrow (or the next day) to answer questions.
- Read and discuss a few of your favorite passages during a follow-up visit.

- Have a member visit them to read with them and answer questions.
- Invite them to see an audiovisual resource (filmstrip, motion picture, videotape) on the Book of Mormon in a member's home.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

Book of Mormon title page (The Book of Mormon is for "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.")

2 Nephi 3:11-12; Ezekiel 37:15-19 (The Book of Mormon and the Bible shall grow together to confound false doctrine and establish peace.)

2 Nephi 29:6-9 (The Lord brings forth his word to all the children of men.)

2 Nephi 33:10-12 ("If ye shall believe in Christ, ye will believe in these words.")

John 10:14-16; 3 Nephi 15:16-24 (Christ visits his other sheep.)

Topical Guide: Book of Mormon

EXAMPLES

To show how the Book of Mormon supports the Bible:

Suppose you wanted to hang a door. Why would you want to use two hinges instead of only one? How do the two hinges, working together, make the door more stable? In the same way, the Bible and the Book of Mormon unite to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. They firmly establish the truth. Both support the truth of the gospel and the divine nature of Jesus Christ.

PRINCIPLE 6 THE HOLY GHOST: A WITNESS OF THE TRUTH

DISCUSSION

The Holy Ghost Confirms the Message of Joseph Smith

By calling the Prophet Joseph Smith and commanding him to bring forth the Book of Mormon, God has followed the pattern he established for revealing truth. God has promised that the Holy Ghost will let you know that the Book of Mormon is true. [Read and discuss John 14:26.]

You Can Know Joseph Smith Is a Prophet

The Holy Ghost will help you know that Joseph Smith was called by God to be a witness of Christ. Once you know these things, you can know that the other things we have been discussing are true.

The Book of Mormon Contains a Promise

The Book of Mormon contains a promise to all who read it. The Lord has given us this promise through Moroni, the last prophet in the Book of Mormon. [Read and discuss Moroni 10:3-5.]

We Should Read, Ponder, and Pray

This passage explains how you can know through the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true. First, you should read it. Second, you should ponder and think about what you have read, comparing the truths in the Book of Mormon with those in the Bible. Third, you should pray to the Father sincerely and with faith in Christ. You have been promised that through the power of the Holy Ghost, your Father in Heaven will help you know that this message is true.

TEACHING HELPS

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators feel it is important for them to find out that the Book of Mormon is true.
- Whether they understand how they can receive guidance from the Holy Ghost.
- Whether they understand how to recognize the influence of the Spirit (usually a peaceful, good feeling rather than something dramatic).

DISCUSSION

Commitment Invitation: Pray

Will you pray and ask our Heavenly Father whether the Book of Mormon is true and whether Joseph Smith was a prophet of God?

TEACHING HELPS

- Whether they have had experiences when they felt touched by the Holy Spirit.

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- How you received a testimony of the truths you have been teaching.
- The promise in Moroni 10:3-5 and your own experience in applying it.
- The power of the Book of Mormon as evidence of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith.

Find Out—

- How the investigators feel about prayer.
- Whether they understand what you expect of them.

Explain: As appropriate, use the "Instruction on Prayer" in the instruction booklet to help the investigators understand the basic pattern of prayer.

1. "Our Father in Heaven . . ."
2. "We thank thee . . ."
3. "We ask thee . . ."
4. "In the name of Jesus Christ, amen."

Follow Up: Discuss with the investigators how you can help them keep their commitment to pray. For example, offer prayers with them each time you visit. Encourage them to offer the prayer as often as possible.

You Can Be Baptized

As the Lord answers your prayers and you feel that this message is true, we hope you will want to follow Christ by being baptized.

Commitment Invitation: Next Discussion

The message we have been discussing is very important to you. We have touched upon only a few of the great and beautiful truths that God has restored in our time. As we explained earlier, this is the first of six presentations. They will explain what God has revealed through latter-day prophets. They will show how you can find great joy and peace in your life.

The next discussion deals with the mission of Jesus Christ. We discuss what he has done for us and how we can enjoy the blessings he has provided for us.

We could come back on (date) at (time) or on (date) at (time). Which of those times would be best for you?

Invite: As prompted by the Spirit, you could now invite the investigators to be baptized. (See the "Invitation to Be Baptized" in the instruction booklet.)

Explain: If needed, you might—

- Remind the investigators of any spiritual feelings they have had as you have talked with them.
- Help them see how your message meets their needs.
- Share experiences of people whose lives have been blessed by the gospel.

Explain: You might—

- Give a brief overview of the second discussion.
- Explain how the discussion will deal with the teachings the investigators will read in the Book of Mormon.

Follow Up: You might—

- Write down the appointment on the back of study guide 1. (If possible, set appointments for all the remaining discussions.)
- Reconfirm the appointment when you drop by in a day or two to review the study guide and the investigators' reading.
- Involve a member friendship. If possible, have the discussion in the member's home. (Or at least have the member present when you teach the discussion.)

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

EXAMPLES

1 Nephi 10:17-19 (Nephi learned the truth by the power of the Holy Ghost.)

John 16:13 ("The Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all truth.")

1 Corinthians 2:9-14 ("The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.")

D&C 6:23 ("Did I not speak peace to your mind?")

D&C 8:1-3 (You shall receive whatever you ask in faith; "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost.")

D&C 9:8-9 ("If it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.")

Topical Guide: Holy Ghost, Mission of; Holy Ghost, Source of Testimony; Meditation, Meditate; Scriptures, Study of

CONCLUSION

DISCUSSION

TEACHING HELPS

Commitments

Remember, during this discussion the investigators should commit themselves to—

1. Read in the Book of Mormon and pray to know that it is true. Pray to know that Joseph Smith was a prophet.
2. Take part in the next discussion.

If they accepted these commitments during the discussion, reconfirm their commitments at the conclusion. If they have not accepted these commitments, invite them now to make the commitments.

Additional Commitments

Attending Church Meetings

The investigators should attend Church meetings as soon as possible. The third discussion focuses on the commitment to attend Church. If you will not teach them that discussion before Sunday, invite them now to attend Church meetings. As appropriate, use the "Invitation to Attend Church" in the instruction booklet.

Baptism

Whenever the Spirit prompts you that the investigators are ready, invite them to commit themselves to be baptized. This commitment should be made as early as possible. As appropriate, use the "Invitation to Be Baptized" in the instruction booklet.

Referrals

Help the investigators identify friends and relatives who could be invited to hear your message. As appropriate, use the "Referral Invitation" in the instruction booklet.

Study Guide

Use the study guide for this discussion to review the principles you have discussed and the commitments the investigators have made. Mark any scriptures to which you want to draw special attention. Fill out the information on the back of the study guide, including the date of your next appointment. Explain that you will be glad to answer any questions during your next visit.

Close with Prayer

Follow the promptings of the Spirit in determining whether to ask an investigator to pray. If they are not ready, either missionary (or a member friendship) may offer the prayer. As necessary, review the "Instruction on Prayer" in the instruction booklet to teach the investigators the basic pattern of prayer.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

